

**Remarks/Arguments:**

In the action of October 7, 2005, the Examiner rejected claims 1 to 50 on the ground that they are obvious from the disclosure of Ryan et al (EP-A-0851373). That conclusion is respectfully traversed.

For the Examiner's reference, we enclose a copy of the search report from the counterpart European application, in which Ryan et al was first cited, which identifies Ryan et al. as being only background art.

This application includes three independent claims (claims 1, 23 and 39), though it is noted that the Examiner has put forward argument to support his objection only in relation to claim 1, and actually acknowledged that there is no disclosure of the subject-matter of claims 23 and 39 in Ryan et al. For completeness, each of the independent claims will nevertheless be considered in turn.

**Claim 1**

Claim 1 is directed to an item handling system and requires at least one item preparation station, which provides for the printing of machine-readable symbols on items, and at least one item handling station, which handles items as received from the at least one item preparation station and provides for the reading and processing of information as contained in the symbols as printed on the items. More particularly, the at least one item handling station includes a messaging unit for generating messages, which are representative of the readability of symbols as read thereby, and transmitting the messages to the at least one item preparation station, and the at least one item preparation station includes an indicator for providing an indication of the readability of symbols as printed thereby in response to messages as received from the at least one item handling station.

The system of the present invention provides for the monitoring of the readability of symbols as printed by an item preparation station during continued operation, thereby enabling the early detection of reduced readability of the symbols, such as caused by a low amount of printing medium, a defective print head, improper print head installation and improper material of the items.

The system of Ryan et al. does aim to provide for the improvement of the print quality of 2D barcodes, but this improvement extends only to the selection of the size of the modules of the printed 2D barcodes [column 2, line 38 to column 3, line 6], such that the 2D barcodes are configured to have a required readability.

Ryan et al makes no suggestion of monitoring the print quality of the 2D barcodes as printed during normal operation, and certainly not in the manner as required by the claimed invention, as will be discussed in more detail below.

The system of Ryan et al provides an item preparation station, insofar as the system comprises a PC (10), a PSD (12) and a printer (18) which provides for the printing of 2D barcodes on items [column 3, lines 22 to 26], but the system does not include an item handling station as required by the claimed invention. Ryan et al. makes no suggestion whatsoever of an item handling station as required by the claimed invention.

In the system of Ryan et al, the printer (18) is operated to print a test print which has a predetermined module size [column 3, lines 34 to 37], which is then scanned by a scanner (22, 24) to check for print quality. In one mode of operation, the test print is scanned by a local scanner (22) and the PC (10) makes a recommendation as to the module size of the 2D barcode based on the print quality [column 3, lines 43 to 45]. In another mode of operation, the test print is sent to the vendor, and the vendor scans the test print with a scanner (24) and makes a recommendation as to the module size of

the 2D barcode based on the print quality [column 4, lines 27 to 31].

Notwithstanding the absence of an item handling station in the system of Ryan et al, Ryan et al makes no suggestion of the transmission of messages, which are representative of the readability of symbols, to the item preparation station, and the item preparation station does not include an indicator for providing an indication of the readability of symbols as printed thereby in response to received messages.

Ryan et al simply does not require such messaging, as the system is concerned only with selecting the module size of the printed 2D barcodes, and makes no recognition whatsoever of monitoring the readability of the printed 2D barcodes during operation. To allege otherwise would require an impermissible hindsight analysis of the prior art.

### **Claim 23**

Claim 23 is directed to an item preparation station, which provides for the printing of machine-readable symbols on items, and more particularly includes an indicator for providing an indication of the readability of symbols as printed thereby in response to messages as received from an item handling station, which handles items as received from the item preparation station.

The item preparation station of the present invention enables the monitoring of the readability of symbols as printed thereby during continued operation, thereby enabling the early detection of reduced readability of the symbols, such as caused by a low amount of printing medium, a defective print head, improper print head installation and improper material of the items.

As noted above, the system of Ryan et al does aim to provide for the improvement of the print quality of printed 2D barcodes, but extends only to the selection of the size of

the modules of the printed 2D barcodes [column 2, line 38 to column 3, line 6], such that the 2D barcodes are configured to have a required readability.

Ryan et al makes no suggestion of monitoring the print quality of the 2D barcodes as printed during normal operation, and certainly not in the manner as required by the claimed invention, as again will be discussed in more detail below.

The system of Ryan et al provides an item preparation station, insofar as the system comprises a PC (10), a PSD (12) and a printer (18) which provides for the printing of 2D barcodes on items [column 3, lines 22 to 26], but makes no suggestion of the provision of an indicator for providing an indication of the readability of symbols as printed thereby in response to received messages from an item handling station.

In the system of Ryan et al, the printer (18) is operated to print a test print which has a predetermined module size [column 3, lines 35 to 37], which is then scanned by a scanner (22, 24) to check for print quality. In one mode of operation, the test print is scanned by a local scanner (22) and the PC (10) makes a recommendation as to the module size of the 2D barcode based on the print quality [column 3, lines 43 to 45]. In another mode of operation, the test print is sent to the vendor, and the vendor scans the test print with a scanner (24) and makes a recommendation as to the module size of the 2D barcode based on the print quality [column 4, lines 27 to 31].

Ryan et al simply does not require such messaging, as the system is concerned only with selecting the module size of the 2D barcode, and makes no recognition whatsoever of monitoring the readability of the printed 2D barcodes during operation. To allege otherwise would require an impermissible hindsight analysis of the prior art.

**Claim 39**

Claim 39 is directed to an item handling station, which handles items as received from an item preparation station, and more particularly includes a messaging unit for generating messages, which are representative of the readability of symbols as read thereby, and transmitting the messages to the item preparation station.

The item handling station of the present invention provides for the monitoring of the readability of symbols as printed by an item preparation station during continued operation, thereby enabling the early detection of reduced readability of the symbols, such as caused by a low amount of printing medium, a defective print head, improper print head installation and improper material of the items.

As again noted above, the system of Ryan et al does aim to provide for the improvement of the print quality of 2D barcodes, but extends only to the selection of the size of the modules of the printed 2D barcodes [column 2, line 38 to column 3, line 6], such that the 2D barcodes are configured to have a required readability.

Ryan et al makes no suggestion of monitoring the print quality of the 2D barcodes as printed during normal operation, and certainly not in the manner as required by the claimed invention, as will be discussed in more detail below.

The system of Ryan et al provides an item preparation station, insofar as the system comprises a PC (10), a PSD (12) and a printer (18) which provides for the printing of 2D barcodes on items [column 3, lines 22 to 26], but the system does not include an item handling station as required by the claimed invention. Ryan et al makes no suggestion whatsoever of an item handling station as required by the claimed invention.

In the system of Ryan et al, the printer (18) is operated to print a test print which has a predetermined module size [column 3, lines 35 to 37], which is then scanned by a scanner (22, 24) to check for print quality. In one mode of operation, the test print is scanned by a local scanner (22) and the PC (10) makes a recommendation as to the module size of the 2D barcode based on the print quality [column 3, lines 43 to 45]. In another mode of operation, the test print is sent to the vendor, and the vendor scans the test print with a scanner (24) and makes a recommendation as to the module size of the 2D barcode based on the print quality [column 4, lines 27 to 31].

Ryan et al makes no suggestion of the transmission of messages, which are representative of the readability of symbols as read thereby, to an item preparation station in the manner as required by the claimed invention.

Ryan et al simply does not require such messaging, as the system is concerned only with selecting the module size of the printed 2D barcode, and makes no recognition whatsoever of monitoring the readability of the printed 2D barcodes during operation. To allege otherwise would require an impermissible hindsight analysis of the prior art.

### Conclusion

In summary, each of the independent claims of this application is submitted to patentably distinguish the present invention from the disclosure of Ryan et al.

The Examiner has also alleged generally that the subject-matter of many of the claims (claims 2, 4 to 24 and 26 to 50) is known from the art of postage metering, but has not identified prior art in support of this allegation. From the applicant's knowledge of the art, this is manifestly not the case, but, without identifying the prior art, this allegation cannot be properly addressed. The Examiner is respectfully requested to identify the relevant art in relation to the respective claims, if the rejection is maintained.

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